

# **Grade Level of Achievement Reporting Questions & Answers**

Updated April 2008

## Grade Level of Achievement Reporting Question and Answers

### Background

1. **What is Grade Level of Achievement (GLA) Reporting to Alberta Education?** GLA reporting involves teachers providing Alberta Education with their judgment of their students level of achievement expressed as "at, above or below grade." This information is the teacher's judgment of their student's achievement in meeting the Program of Studies outcomes in grades 1 to 9 language arts and mathematics. This data is then used by the department, school authorities and schools to help determine how well different programs are working for different groups of students.
2. **Why is Alberta Education implementing GLA Reporting?** Government is committed to improving how the education system assesses student performance. In addition, GLA data will provide all levels of the education system with student performance information that will help decision-makers at the school, jurisdiction and provincial levels evaluate the impact of education programs. This information will be particularly useful in examining performance of groups of students (e.g., by gender, students with high mobility rates, the performance of ESL students, students with special needs, etc.). As additional data is collected each year, provincial trends can be monitored for these different groups of students that could result in local and/or provincial programs, initiatives and/or policy aimed at helping students be more successful.

GLA reporting to Alberta Education will provide valuable information to schools, school authorities and the province on how well different groups of students are achieving and what factors may influence this performance.

3. **How is GLA data being used?** The reports developed from GLA are expected to provide information that could help inform programming decisions at the provincial, jurisdictional and school levels. The data collected by Alberta Education will be used to:
  - evaluate whether or not specialized funded programs are helping students in reaching their potential (ex. English as a Second Language programs, Aboriginal programs, etc.);
  - fill in the gaps of information in the years between the Provincial Achievement Test results in Grades 3, 6 and 9;
  - monitor year to year growth (are students improving, etc.);
  - provide individual student history (only by request to replace missing files when a student transfers)

GLA data will not be used by Alberta Education to evaluate jurisdiction, school or teacher performance; except potentially in rare cases when a Ministerial review is undertaken under Section 43 of the *School Act*.

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4. **Can GLA data be provided to the public through the FOIP Act?** Yes, however it is important to point out that only aggregated, non-personal data can be accessible through FOIP legislation.
5. **What is the timeline for implementing GLA?** The current implementation plan for GLA data collection contains a phased in approach. Stakeholders had advised Alberta Education that more time was needed to support implementation of reporting to Alberta Education so the timelines were extended by one year. The revised schedule requested one-third of schools to report GLA at the end of the 2006-07 school year. These levels were exceeded with 60% of schools submitting GLA data. Given this level of success, each jurisdiction, Francophone Authority and Charter School with Grades 1-9 will be expected to report Language Arts and Math GLA to Alberta Education by June 2008.
6. **Will GLA be reported to Alberta Education in Science and Social Studies?** The department has referred the question of whether GLA should be reported to Alberta Education in Social Studies and Science to an internal curriculum committee for further study and recommendation. The report from this committee is anticipated in the summer of 2008.
7. **What does GLA data look like?** Beginning with the 2007-08 school year, GLA will be reported to Alberta Education as “at, above or below enrolled grade.” This new method restricts reporting GLA as “at, above or below grade level” using a two character alpha set as follows: **AT** = at grade level; **AB**= above grade level; or **BE** = below grade level.

Alberta Education has provided school authorities with a series of 2005-06 and 2006-07 GLA reports that include provincial, school authority and school data on the Extranet. These GLA reports provide value added analysis of the GLA data that will help in analyzing students’ achievement taking into account various factors like student codes, gender, mobility, birth month, etc.

8. **Is GLA reporting to parents based in any other Alberta Education policy?** As of 1996, teachers were expected to report the grade level at which a student is performing to parents. Reporting GLA in core subjects to parents is an existing requirement under the *Guide to Education* (p.109). The *Guide* is used by administrators, counselors, teachers and other parties engaged in the delivery of quality basic education. It contains procedures, organizational information, and references to government policies required to operate schools @ <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/>.
9. **How should GLA be reported to parents?** School authorities determine the appropriate way to report GLA to parents/guardians in relation to the requirements outlined in the *Guide to Education*.
10. **How did GLA reporting to Alberta Education evolve?** In 2000, a team made up of four school boards and the Ministry considered alternatives to the Management Information Reporting Schedules (MIRS). The team tabled their

report, *MIRS – Next Generation: Design Principles for a Learner Results Database* in the spring of 2001.

The task force's report was given extensive review by Alberta Education. The result was the report "*Beyond MIRS: New Directions for Program Evaluation*." Concurrently, the Review Committee on Outcomes (RCO), with extensive stakeholder participation, endorsed a closely related measure, "Improvement over time of students, who are not subject to Individual Program Plans (IPPs), performing below, at or above grade level."

Based on the *Beyond MIRS* report and the recommendations of the Review Committee on Outcomes, a pilot project to assess the feasibility and validity of GLA data was formally launched in September 2003. An evaluation of the pilot project, *Beyond MIRS Pilot Project Assessment – Final Report*, and an analysis of the validity and reliability of GLA data, *Beyond MIRS Data – Technical Report* both supported expansion of the pilot to provincial implementation. Analysis of 2005-06 GLA data has provided continuing support for collecting GLA data.

These reports, and the RCO documentation, are available on the Alberta Education website at <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/ipr>.

**11. Is GLA reporting related to the Alberta Commission on Learning report?**

Implementing GLA relates to the Alberta Commission on Learning's comments on accountability in recommendation 60. This recommendation speaks to the need to "Provide ongoing, comprehensive, consistent and transparent information to Albertans about the outcomes achieved by Alberta's students" and is consistent with many aspects of GLA reporting.

## Evaluation of Phase II (2005-06) and Phase III (2006-07) GLA pilots

**12. What did the evaluation of the Phase II GLA pilot find out?** Over the 2005-06 school year, we received ongoing feedback on the implementation of the Grade Level of Achievement (GLA) reporting initiative, including that:

- 95 % of pilot school principals and jurisdiction superintendents found the draft of the GLA Handbook helpful;
- the GLA Task Team, feedback from the 16 orientation sessions and feedback from Superintendents and principals advised slowing down implementation;
- the focus of GLA reporting to government should be on LA and Math only;
- jurisdictions want Alberta Education to develop standards and exemplars for reporting GLA to government for Language Arts and Math;
- there is a need for more understanding and training of teachers in assessment; and
- there is a need for professional development opportunities and collaborative planning time.

**13. What did the evaluation of the Phase III GLA pilot find out?** Collection of GLA data by Alberta Education was expected for one-third of the public, separate and Francophone schools and all charter schools in the province. Results exceeded expectations with 60% of these schools submitting data on-time. Error rates in data submissions were below three percent. The fact that the number of schools submitting GLA data greatly exceeded expectations indicates that implementation is well ahead of schedule.

**14. How has the department responded to the findings of the pilots?** Based on the feedback received the department has focused on the following:

- the *GLA Reporting Handbook* was revised with continued input from the Alberta Assessment Consortia and was distributed to all grades 1-9 school and central office. Copies are also available at cost from the LRC. Additional updates are planned for the 2007-08 reporting period;
- LA and Math will be the focus for 2007-08. Further study will be undertaken regarding reporting GLA to Alberta Education in Social Studies and Science;
- the department is looking at providing additional curricular outcome standards, rubrics or exemplars to support teachers in determining the GLA of their students.

### Benefits to Schools

- 15. How does the data benefit school authorities and schools?** In addition to analysing data at the provincial level, Alberta Education will provide school authority and school level GLA reports back to each school board and school through the Extranet. This information will help inform jurisdiction program decisions particularly regarding how well the education system is meeting the needs of specific groups of students and how particular local contextual factors such as student mobility influence student achievement. A GLA Reports User Guide has been developed to help principals and superintendents access GLA reports confidentially.
- 16. How does GLA help students?** The information that Alberta Education collects from schools will be incorporated into provincial-level summary reports that will be shared with school authorities and schools. These reports provide jurisdiction staff with more information of how different groups of students are doing. This information will help inform programming and policy decisions aimed at improving student achievement at the provincial, jurisdictional and school levels.

### Benefits to Teachers

- 17. How does GLA reporting affect teachers' assessment skills?** Feedback from the GLA pilots demonstrated that teachers have a renewed understanding of the Program of Studies and Assessment for Learning through opportunities for talking with colleagues about student achievement.

The Phase I and II GLA pilots also demonstrated that teachers increased their skills in the area of classroom assessment through dialogue with colleagues. This is a priority area identified by Alberta Education in conjunction with the Alberta post-secondary faculties of education, and work is underway to research and improve pre-service and in-service training in classroom assessment.

- 18. How does GLA support "Assessment for Learning"?** Recent research on classroom assessment clearly demonstrates that an emphasis on formative assessment or assessment for learning, strongly reinforces student achievement. This body of research is strongly represented in the *GLA Reporting Handbook* developed by Alberta Education with the Alberta Assessment Consortium to support the GLA initiative.

**19. What supports are provided to help teachers and principals?** The following work is now underway:

- Presentations have been made to the Faculties of Education regarding the implications of GLA reporting requirements for pre-service training;
- the *GLA Reporting Handbook* was updated to help teachers and principals. It has been sent to all schools, superintendents and stakeholder organizations. A French language version also has been produced;
- a digital access for teachers and administration to curricular performance standards, rubrics and/or exemplars is under development;
- enhancements have been made to *Edulink* to provide for simpler and more effective GLA data transmissions procedures;
- A larger number of Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) projects are addressing classroom assessment;
- Discussions have been held with the Alberta Professional Development Consortia and the Alberta Assessment Consortium regarding the need to provide in-service for classroom assessment that supports teachers in reporting GLA to parents and the province;
- A conditional grant of \$250,000 has been provided to three Alberta faculties of education to research how best to build capacity in the area of classroom assessment; and,
- \$2.5 million is being provided to support in-service for classroom assessment.

### Reporting Requirements

**20. How do teachers report GLA for students who are capable of achieving above their current grade level?** In order for a student to be assigned a GLA higher than their assigned grade the student must have received instruction and be assessed on the learner outcomes from the Program of Studies for the higher grade level. Most school authorities provide horizontal enrichment for students with higher aptitude. These students are provided enriched instruction at their grade level and are assessed on the learner outcomes of their assigned grade. These students would receive a GLA “at” their enrolled grade.

**21. Are teachers required to report GLA to parents?** The decision of how teachers report a student’s GLA to parents/guardians is a local decision of the teacher, school and school authority in relationship to the specifications in the *2007-08 Guide to Education* (p.109).

**22. How can GLA be reported consistently across grades and for all students?** In Alberta, learning outcomes for all students are set through our Programs of Study. All partners in the education system are responsible for ensuring our students meet these expectations across the province. Enhanced teacher professional dialogue and discussion will assist teachers to consistently report GLA across grades and for all students. In addition, professional development opportunities, the *GLA Reporting Handbook*, and digital access for teachers and administration to curricular performance standards, rubrics and/or exemplars will assist teachers.

- 23. What about special needs students?** Special reporting options are provided for students with special needs not studying a graded curriculum. See page 86 of the *Grade Level of Achievement Reporting – Teacher and Administrator Handbook*.
- 24. Does GLA need to be reported to Alberta Education for Home Education or Distance Education students?** The Grade Level of Achievement initiative does not align with the unique assessment needs of home-educated students because the student's program may not follow the Alberta Programs of Study. Consequently, there is no requirement for reporting GLA for Home Education students. Students in blended programs or distance education students whose language arts or math programs are provided for charter, public, separate or Francophone schools should be included in GLA reports to Alberta Education by the school authority that holds the primary registration for that student.
- 25. Does GLA need to be reported to Alberta Education by Private Schools?** GLA data is not being collected as part of the Accountability Pillar under the authority of the Government Accountability Act. Rather the authority to collect GLA data is under the School Act, therefore private schools are not required to report GLA to Alberta Education, but accredited private schools subject to the *Guide to Education* are expected to report GLA to parents as per the *Guide* requirements.
- 26. Will teachers need to develop Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) for students below grade level?** No; however, teachers may want to consider differentiated instruction as a strategy to meet these student's needs. Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) are written commitments of intent by educational teams to ensure appropriate planning for exceptional students. They are working documents and records of student progress. Differentiated instruction refers to how teachers plan instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. Teachers differentiate instruction by adjusting learning content, process, products, and/or the learning environment. See page 59-65 of the *GLA Reporting Handbook*.
- 27. Should a teacher use a single test to determine GLA?** GLA cannot be based on a single test. A teacher's judgement of a student's GLA should be determined on the full range of classroom work and assessments throughout the school year, including but not limited to provincial achievement tests where available. Research on assessment practices indicate that, assuming valid design, multiple teacher assessments considered comprehensively have higher reliability than any single test.
- 28. What about reporting GLA to Alberta Education for students taking Knowledge and Employability (K and E) courses?** For example, for students taking Knowledge and Employability (K and E) English Language Arts 8 (ELA) who have achieved the learning outcomes for the Knowledge and Employability ELA 8 course, their GLA would be "AT" grade level. If they have not achieved



the learning outcomes for K and E ELA 8, it would be appropriate to report their GLA relative to the regular Language Arts curriculum that would have been documented prior to their entry into the K and E course.

**29. How should a teacher report GLA if they legitimately do not know what the student's GLA is?** There will be cases, for example for a student who transfers late in the school year into a school without any accompanying information, where a teacher lacks sufficient information to judge GLA. In these rare circumstances the code "NA" for Not Available or Not Applicable may be used.

**30. How should a teacher report GLA for students enrolled in Late French Immersion programs starting in grade 7?** There is currently no mandated Program of Studies for this program since students are expected to join the regular immersion program in either grade 8 or 9. As a result it would not be appropriate to declare a GLA in French Language Arts until such time as they do join the mandated immersion curriculum, so the "Not Applicable" code would be used in this circumstance.

**31. What degree of accuracy does Alberta Education expect for the GLA data?**  
In most cases a teacher has opportunity over the course of an entire school year to assess a student's level of achievement. This assessment will include a wide range of formal and informal assessments and will also be informed through daily observation and communications with the student or more intuitive ways of knowing a student.

Because of these rich opportunities for knowing a student's levels of achievement and a student's instructional level, it is reasonable to expect GLA data to be accurate. However, the literature on teacher development has noted for some time that classroom assessment, relative to other areas of teacher expertise, has sometimes been given inadequate attention in some pre-service and in-service contexts.

Essentially, it is anticipated GLA data quality will initially be good, but will improve as experience with GLA reporting stimulates further development of the classroom assessment area of teacher expertise.

**32. Should a teacher also be expected to know the learner outcomes at the grade levels above and below the grade they are teaching?**

As stated in the GLA Handbook (page 12), "Teachers need to be cognizant of the learner outcomes in Programs of Study at the grade level they are teaching as well as those both above and below that grade level in order to respond to a wide range of student strengths and areas of need. How teachers respond to the needs of students who are already meeting the standard of excellence for their grade placement will depend on whether their school jurisdiction's policy emphasizes horizontal or vertical enrichment."

### Technical Background

**33. Is GLA reporting necessary to enhance accountability of school authorities?**

GLA is not designed to part of the Accountability Pillar for school authorities but to supplement provincial information on student achievement and provide better information to plan and evaluate program success and improve learning opportunities for students at the provincial, school authority and school level.

**34. Are there further consultations taking place and if so, what are they?**

Feedback and ongoing dialogue with school authorities, teachers and parents is very important to successful Grade Level of Achievement Reporting (GLA) implementation. All of the feedback collected during Phase II and III of the implementation including regional sessions, feedback from superintendents and pilot school principal's, and feedback on the handbook has been used to inform and to make adjustments to the next steps of the GLA initiative. Alberta Education continues to work with key stakeholders in fine tuning implementation strategies.

**35. How does GLA reporting align with the Alberta Education Business Plans?**

GLA reporting has been a strategy in Alberta Education's Business Plans since 2004-07. In the current, 2007-10 Business Plan, GLA is addressed as strategy 2.4, "Work with stakeholders to ensure implementation of 'grade level of achievement' reporting."

**36. Is GLA a measure in the new accountability pillar?** No. While, accountability involves taking what we know and using the information to constantly improve results, GLA data will not be a required measure in the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar.

**37. How is the GLA data being collected?** GLA data must be submitted electronically via "Edulink" to protect students' personal information. Once submitted GLA data simply become a small additional component of data schools already submit to Alberta Education for inclusion in the Student Information System. A *GLA-Edulink Manual* has been developed to inform the technical procedures for submitting GLA data digitally. This manual will be updated for the 2007-08 data submissions and will be available on the Alberta Education website.

**38. Does Alberta Education have the legal authority to collect GLA?** The department's authority to collect GLA from school authorities is set out in the *School Act* and in the *Student Record Regulation* in conjunction with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The Guide to Education also supports the collection of information required for reporting GLA.

**39. Does GLA data collection comply with the FOIP Act?** The Alberta Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has reviewed and approved a Privacy Impact Assessment regarding GLA reporting and data management to ensure it

meets the requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

**40. How long will it take for full implementation of GLA?** Alberta Education anticipates that full implementation of GLA reporting to Alberta Education will be achieved at the end of the 2007-08 school year, but that refinement of underlying classroom assessment will be an ongoing process for several years.

**41. Who can I contact for additional information on GLA reporting?**

Accountability and Reporting: Dr. John Burger, (780) 422-0999

Learning Supports: Mr. David Woloshyn, (780) 415-9312

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